

## **Edwards: A New Day for America's Veterans New Congress Keeps Promises As Historic Funding Increase Becomes Reality**

(Washington, DC)— U.S. Representative Chet Edwards (TX17) today hailed the President's release today of \$3.7 billion in additional veterans funding provided by Congress. The \$3.7 billion above the President's budget request for 2008 was designated as emergency funding under the final 2008 appropriations bill authored and passed by the Democratic Congress in December. Edwards authored the VA provisions in the bill, which increases funding for veterans health care and benefits by \$6.6 billion above the 2007 level, the largest single increase in the 77-year history of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

"This historic funding increase represents a new day for America's veterans and their families, and says clearly to all who have served in uniform that as you have kept your promises to our country, we will keep our promises to you," said Edwards, Chairman of the House Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Subcommittee.

"For 5.8 million veterans, this new funding means more qualified doctors and nurses to improve medical services. For the 400,000 veterans, including combat wounded vets, who are having to wait too long to have their benefits cases reviewed, this bill means over 1,800 new VA case workers to reduce the unacceptable delays in receiving earned benefits," said Edwards. "For veterans with traumatic brain injury, post-traumatic stress disorder, mental health care issues, and lost limbs, this bill means renewed hope to rebuild their lives. For many of the 200,000 homeless veterans in America, it means the dignity of not having to sleep on the streets and hope for a better future."

When Democrats took control of Congress in 2007, they made the health care needs of veterans a top priority, and provided \$11.8 billion overall in increased funding, \$3.4 billion increase in the fiscal year 2007 continuing resolution( CR), \$1.8 billion in the May 2007 Iraq war spending bill, and the \$6.6 billion in the fiscal year 2008 VA bill.

"The new Congress delivered on our promise to America's veterans and their families by enacting a historic increase of \$11.8 billion in our first year on the job, and our veterans have earned every dime of this through their service and sacrifice for country," said Edwards. "This increased funding for veterans is a historic accomplishment, but this isn't about dollars. It's about fulfilling a moral obligation to those who have served. It is about remembering that our veterans' sacrifices don't end after they return home, and neither should our commitment to them. For some, that timely care could be the difference between health and depression, for others, the difference between life and death."

This increase won widespread support and praise from America's leading veterans' organizations including the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Military Officers Association of America, Paralyzed Veterans of America, and Disabled American Veterans.

"In all my years with The American Legion, this budget stands out as a monumental achievement," said Marty Conaster, national commander of The American Legion.

"This budget puts veterans first, which will help ensure the VA remains a world-class healthcare system that is accessible and responsive to those who may require a lifetime of care for their physical and mental injuries," said George Lisicki, a Vietnam veteran from Carteret, N.J., who leads the 2.3 million-member Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. and its Auxiliaries.